

Chapter 2 Working in the Industry

OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, the student should be able to:

- ⊗ discuss ethical issues in the workplace.
- ⊗ work as a participating member of a work team.
- ⊗ communicate effectively with fellow workers.
- ⊗ explain the value of lifelong learning.



Glossary of Terms

body language unwritten, unspoken message communicated by the way we hold our body or by the expressions on our face.

ethics the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation.

values what we believe is right and wrong.



Often success in a career depends more on how people act or how they present themselves to the world than it does on how skilled they are at their job. Most employers would prefer to have a person with modest skills but a great work ethic than a person with great skills but a weak ethic. In this chapter we will examine some of the non-skill issues that will be most important to you in your career.

Ethics

Ethics are principles of conduct that determine which behaviors are right and wrong. There are two aspects of ethics: values and actions. **Values** have to do with what we believe to be right or wrong. We can have a very strong sense of values, knowing the difference between right and wrong, but not act on those values. If we know what is right but we act otherwise, we lack ethics. To be ethical, we must have good values and act accordingly.

We often hear that someone has a great *work ethic*. That simply means that the person has good ethics in matters pertaining to work. Work ethic is the quality of putting your full effort into your job and striving to do the best job you can. A person with a strong work ethic has the qualities listed in Figure 2-1. Good work ethics become habits, and the easiest way to develop good work ethics is to consciously practice them.

Common Rationalizations

We judge ourselves by our best intentions and our best actions. Others judge us by our last worst act. Conscientious people who want to do their jobs well often fail to consider their behavior at work. They tend to compartmentalize ethics into two parts: private and occupational. As a result, sometimes good people think it is okay to do things at work that they know would be wrong outside of work. They forget that everyone's first job is to be a good person. People can easily fall prey to rationalizations when they are trying to support a good cause. "It is all for a good cause" is an attractive rationale that changes how we see deception, con-

cealment, conflicts of interest, favoritism, and violations of established rules and procedures. In making tough decisions, do not be distracted by rationalizations.

There are great benefits to having good work ethics. As little children, most of us learned the difference between right and wrong. As adults, when we do what we know is right, we feel good about ourselves and what we are doing. On the other hand, doing what we know is wrong is depressing. Although we might think we are getting something for nothing, in that part of us that was programmed as a little child, we know that we have done wrong. We lose respect for ourselves, knowing that what we have done is not something we would want others to do to us. If we make it a habit to do what we know in our hearts not to be right, we develop a general feeling about life and our job. The days seem to go very slowly, and we are happy less often. But if we develop a habit of always trying to do our best, we know that we are doing what is right. Life seems fun, and we look forward to what will come next. Employers recognize people with a good work ethic. They are the people who are always doing something productive, their work turns out better, and they seem cheerful most of the time. Which person do you think an employer will give the most opportunities to: a person who is always busy and whose work is usually well done or a person who seems glum and must always be told what to do next?

Working on a Team

Constructing a building is not a job for one person acting alone (Fig. 2-2). The work at the site requires cooperative effort by carpenters, masons, plumbers, painters, electricians, and others. There are usually several workers from each of these trades. Can you imagine a football game in which each player tries to do it all, without involving his teammates? There would be no blocking, or if there were, it would be in the wrong place. If a pass were thrown, who would catch it? There would be chaos on the field. A construction project without teamwork would have the same kinds of problems. One carpenter's work would not match up with another carpenter's work. There would be too much of some materials and not enough of others. Walls would be enclosed before the electricians ran the wiring in them.

Teamwork is very important on a construction site, but what does being a team player on a construction team mean? Effective team members have the best interests of the whole team at heart. Each team member has to carry his or her own load, but it goes beyond that. Sometimes a team member might have to carry more than his or her own load, just because that is what is best for the team. If you are installing electrical boxes and the plumber says one of your boxes is in the way of a pipe, it might be in the best interests of the project to move the electrical box. That would mean you would have to undo work you had just completed and then redo it. It is, after all, a lot easier to relocate an outlet box than to reroute a sink drain.

A person with a strong work ethic:

- shows up to work a few minutes early instead of a few minutes late.
- looks for a job to do as soon as the previous one is done. (This person is sometimes described as a self-starter.)
- does every job as well as possible.
- stays with a task until it is completely finished.
- looks for opportunities to learn more about the job.
- cooperates with others on the job.
- is honest with the employer's materials, time, and resources.

Figure 2-1 Characteristics of good work ethic.

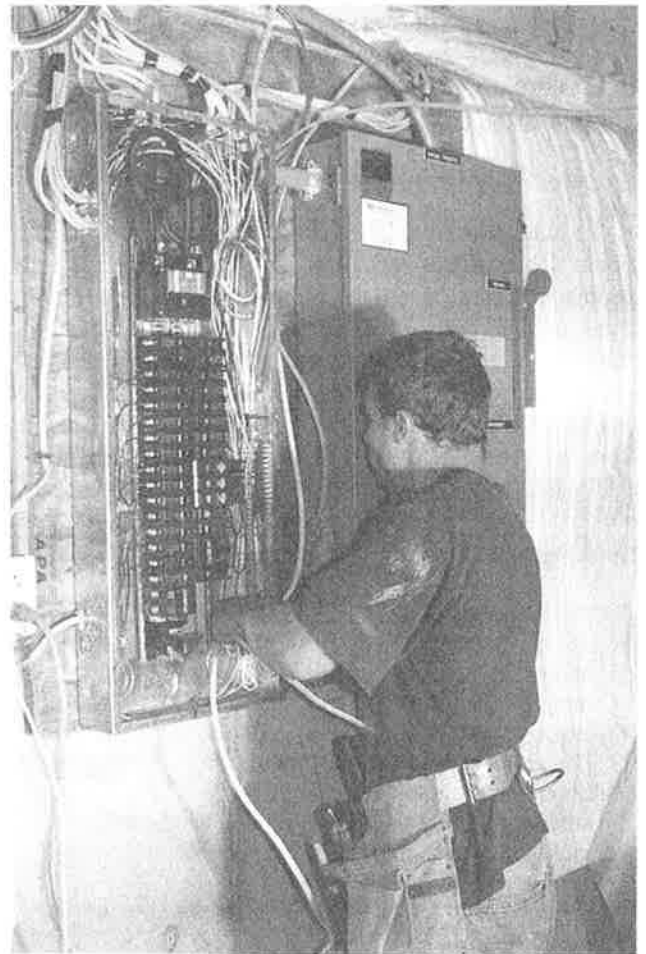
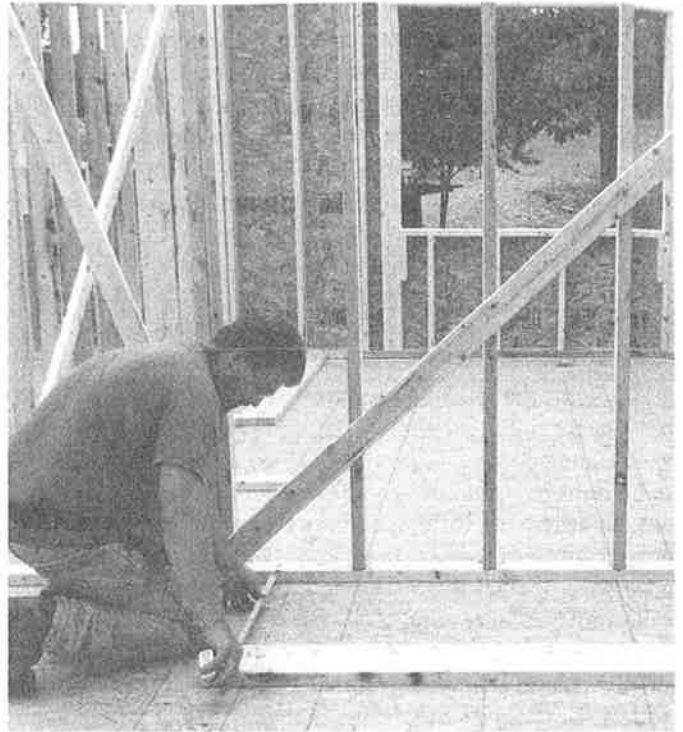


Figure 2-2 Work on the job requires cooperative effort by individuals from different trade areas.

The following are six traits of an effective team:

- *Listening.* Team members listen to one another's ideas. They build on teammates' ideas.
- *Questioning.* Team members ask one another sincere questions.
- *Respect.* Team members respect one another's opinions. They encourage and support the ideas of others.
- *Helping.* Team members help one another.
- *Sharing.* Team members offer ideas to one another and tell one another what they have learned.
- *Participation.* Team members contribute ideas, discuss them, and play an active role together in projects.

Communication

Remember that football team. How could members function as a team without communication? Good communication is one of the most important skills for success in any career. Employers want workers who can communicate effectively; but more importantly, you must be able to communicate with others to do your job well and to be a good team member. Look back at the six traits of an effective team in the last section and ask yourself which traits require communication?

There are many forms of communication, but the most basic ones are speaking, listening, writing, reading, and body language. If you master those five forms of communication, you will probably succeed in your career.

Speaking

To communicate well through speech, you need a reasonably good vocabulary. It is not necessary, or even desirable, to fill your speech with a lot of flowery words that do not say much or that you do not really understand. What is necessary is to know the words that convey what you want the listener to hear, and it is equally necessary to use good enough grammar so those words can be communicated properly. Using the wrong word or using it improperly can cause two serious problems: For one thing, if you use the wrong word, you will not be saying what you intended to say. This is also often true if you use a great word wrong since you still might not be saying what you thought you were saying. For another thing (the second serious problem), using a poor choice of words or using bad grammar gives the listener the impression that you are poorly educated or that maybe you just do not care about good communication skills. As a businessperson, you will find that communicating is critical to earning respect as a professional as well as to gaining people's business. Look your listeners in the eye. Ask yourself if you think they understand what you are saying. If it is important, ask them if they understand. If they do not understand, try a different approach. The best way to develop good speaking skills is by practicing them—even when you are just with your friends. And your friends will be much more impressed with your effort to speak well than they would be with your ability to speak poorly.

Listening

Good listening is an important skill. Have you ever had people say something to you, and after they were finished and gone, you wondered what they said or you missed some of the details? Perhaps they were giving you directions or telling you about a school assignment. If only you could listen to them again! If possible, try paraphrasing. Paraphrasing means to repeat what they said but in different words. If someone gives you directions, wait until the person is finished. Then repeat the directions to person, so he or she can tell you if you are correct. Look at the speaker and form a mental picture of what the speaker is saying. Make what the speaker is saying important to you. Good listening can mean hearing and acting on a detail of a job that will result in giving a competitive edge in bidding.

Writing

Writing is a lot like speaking, except you do not have the advantage of seeing if the person seems to understand or of asking if the person understands. That means you really have to consider your reader. If you are giving instructions, keep them as simple as possible. If you are reporting something to a supervisor, make your report complete, but do not take up his or her time with unrelated trivia. Penmanship, spelling, and grammar count. Always use good grammar to ensure that you are saying what you intend and that your reader will take you seriously. Use standard penmanship, and make it as neat as possible. Do not invent new ways of forming letters, and do not try to make your penmanship ornate. You will only make it harder to read. If you are unsure of how to spell a word, look it up in a dictionary. Next time, you will know the word and will not have to look it up. After you write something—read it, thinking about how your intended reader will take it. Make changes if necessary. Your writing is important! Sole proprietors have to demonstrate good writing skills in proposals and contracts. If either of these is poorly written, it can cost the business a lot of money.

Reading

You will have to read at work. That is a fact no matter what your occupation. You will have to read building specifications, instructions for use of materials and tools, safety notices, and notes from the boss. To develop reading skills, find something you are interested in and spend at least 10 or 15 minutes every day reading it. You might read the sports section of the newspaper, books about your hobby, hunting and fishing magazines, or anything else that is interesting to you. What is important is that you read. Practicing reading will make you a better reader. It will also make you a better writer and a better speaker. When you come across a word you do not know how to pronounce or you do not know the meaning of, look it up or ask someone for help. You will find that you learn pronunciation and meaning very quickly, and your communication skills will



Figure 2-3 Body language is an important form of communication.

improve faster than you expect. In practically no time, you will not need help very often.

Body Language

Body language is an important form of communication. How you position your body and what you do with your hands, face, and eyes all convey a lot of information to the person you are communicating with (Fig. 2-3). Whole books are written about how body language is used to communicate and how to read body language. We will only discuss a couple of key points here.

When you look happy and confident, the message you convey is that you are honest (you have nothing to hide or to worry about) and you probably know what you are talking about. If you look unhappy, unsure of yourself, or uninterested, your body language tells the other person to be wary of what you are saying—something is wrong. The following are a few rules for body language that will help you convey a favorable message:

- Look the other person in the eye. Looking toward the floor makes you look untrustworthy. Looking off in space makes you seem uninterested in the other person.
- Keep your hands out of your pockets, and do not wring your hands. Just let your hands rest at your sides or in your lap if you are sitting. An occasional hand gesture is okay, but do not overdo it.
- Dress neatly. Even if you are wearing work clothes, you can be neat. Faddish clothes, extra baggy or extra tight fitting clothes, and T-shirts with offensive messages on them all distract from the real you.
- Speak up. How loudly you speak might not seem like body language, but it has a lot to do with how people react to you. If they have to strain to hear what you are saying, they will think that either you are not confident in what you are saying or you are angry and not to be

trusted. If you see your listeners straining to hear you or if they frequently ask you to repeat what you are saying, speak a little louder.

Customer Service

In any industry, you will only be as successful as you are good at building your reputation for doing quality work and for the degree to which your customers are happy with you and your job. On the job site, your customer might be a crew chief, a foreman, a subcontractor, or a contractor. If you are the contractor or subcontractor, the customer will be whoever hired you. It doesn't actually matter who hired you, though—your role will always be to do the very best job you can for whomever it is that you are working.

Good customer service also includes providing a good value for your fees, being honest, communicating clearly, being cooperative, and looking to provide the best possible experience your customer can have in working with you. Just as when you practice good ethics, when you provide great customer service you will enjoy your job much more. You will be proud of your work, others will want to hire you more often, and your career will be much easier to build. Think about how you like being treated when you are a customer—and always try to treat your customers at least as well.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning refers to the idea that we all need to continue to learn throughout our entire lives. Not so long ago, those who were fortunate enough to get a formal education started it in elementary school; and if they did well and their families did not need them to help with work and support, they went to high school. In their teens, most men went to work or started an apprenticeship, and most women either worked in low-paying jobs or did housework. Only the wealthy and very fortunate went on to college. An apprentice worked alongside a skilled craftsman and learned a skilled trade. Apprentices were generally indentured, meaning that in return for learning a trade with a journeyman, they were committed to working for that journeyman for a specified number of years. Those great craftspeople of the past usually spent their entire working lives in the same job.

We have greater opportunities to learn and greater opportunities to move up a career ladder today. Our lives are filled with technology, innovative new materials, and new opportunities. People change not only jobs, but entire careers several times during their working life. Those workers who do not understand the new technology in the workplace, along with those who do not keep up with the changes in how their company is managed, are destined to fall behind—not stay even, but actually fall behind economically. There is little room in a fast-paced company of this

century for a person whose knowledge and skills are not growing as fast as the company. If all you know are the techniques, equipment, and materials that were current 10 or 15 years ago, and if you have not made any attempt to learn the skills necessary to move up in the management of the company, you will not be nearly as valuable to the company as you were when those skills were the state of the art.

To keep up with new information and to develop new skills for the changing workplace, everyone must continue to learn throughout life. Some high school graduates still choose the time-tested route of entering college immediately after high school graduation. Others enlist in the military or begin an apprenticeship. All these graduates are continuing to learn so that they will be better prepared to work in the modern, changing world. Are they finished learning after college or the military or when they complete

their apprenticeship? No, the worker is no more finished with the need to learn than the world is finished changing. Companies today send their employees to special classes that pertain to their jobs or to possible future jobs. Many adult workers, often people in their 40s and 50s, fill college classrooms. It is not uncommon for an engineer or a doctor to attend classes at a community college with the intention of starting a new career. The organizations that train large numbers of apprentices (unions, trade associations, very large employers, etc.) frequently list more courses for journeymen than they do for apprentices. That's because those journeymen recognize the importance of continuing to learn throughout their careers. Throughout this textbook there are profiles of construction workers, most of whom have continued their education by formal or informal studies during their careers.



Review Questions

- 1 Who has the primary responsibility for making decisions about your education and training for work?
 - 2 Which is likely to have the greatest impact on your success in the career you have chosen: use of proper English, your attitude, or your skill in the work you do?
 - 3 How would you define "ethics"?
 - 4 What benefits are there for doing what is ethically right?
 - 5 Explain one reason why people suffer from their own unethical behavior.
 - 6 Describe the characteristics of a good team member.
 - 7 List five forms of communication.
 - 8 How can you know if people understand you when you are speaking to them?
 - 9 How can you verify that you understand what someone else is saying to you?
 - 10 List four things that will help you communicate better in writing.
 - 11 Describe three things a construction worker would have to read. Describe situations that require a paragraph or more of reading.
 - 12 Describe how a person could use body language to communicate that they are interested in what someone else is saying to them.
 - 13 Describe what the term "lifelong learning" means.
 - 14 Why has lifelong learning become increasingly important in the construction industry?
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